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ABSTRACT

As growing numbers of mothers enter the workforce, understanding the effects of maternal employment on children and adolescents has become increasingly important. The effects of maternal employment after infancy on adult attachment, and how these effects vary as a function of children's personality style are examined in this paper. It was hypothesized that extraversion would mediate the effects of maternal employment on adult attachment. Responses from 106 undergraduates were obtained on 3 different measures. A median split was performed to divide subjects into high and low extraversion subgroups. Subjects were then grouped on the basis of their mother's employment status (full time, part time, nonemployed) during the subject's childhood (preschool, schoolage, adolescent years). There were no effects found for maternal employment during the preschool years. During the elementary school and adolescent years, part-time maternal employment was shown to have the most advantageous attachment effects. Part-time employed mothers may be more nurturing in that they sacrifice full-time work for their children. Maternal nonemployment was associated with more negative attachment outcomes for introverted children, suggesting that they may prefer and benefit from the additional time alone. (Author/RJM)

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Young Adults' Attachment: Does Maternal Employment Make a Difference?

Attachment Correlates of Maternal Employment after Infancy

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1997

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Summary-The present study examined the effects of maternal employment after infancy on adult attachment, and how these effects vary as a function of children's personality style. Extraversion was expected to mediate the effects of maternal employment on adult attachment. Responses from 106 undergraduates were obtained on 3 different measures: the Eysenck Personality Inventory (1963), the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996), the Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire (Scharfe, 1995). A median split was performed to divide subjects into high and low extraversion subgroups. Subjects were then grouped on the basis of their mother's employment status (fulltime, parttime, nonemployed) during the subject's childhood (preschool, schoolage, adolescent years). There were no effects found for maternal employment during the preschool years. During the elementary school and adolescent years, part-time maternal employment was shown to have the most advantageous attachment effects. Part-time employed mothers may be more nurturing in that they sacrifice full-time work for their children. Maternal nonemployment was associated with more negative attachment outcomes for introverted children, suggesting that they may prefer and benefit from the additional time alone.

Introduction

Understanding the effects of maternal employment on children and adolescents has become increasingly important, due to the growing number of mothers entering the workforce. Recent Census Bureau statistics indicate that the two-paycheck family is now the norm, even among families with children under 12 months of age (U.S. Census figure, 1990). The rate of maternal employment for two-parent families with school-age children is at least 71%, and this figure continues to rise each year (Hoffman, 1989). The so-called "traditional" family, with sole breadwinner father and stay-at-home mother, currently accounts for less than 3% of American families (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).

There has been considerable debate over whether maternal employment is beneficial or detrimental for children. Over the years, many researchers have postulated global negative cognitive, academic, emotional and self-esteem repercussions of maternal employment. Nearly five decades of research has failed to affirm the majority of these pessimistic predictions about the children of employed women. Most studies have found very few differences between children grouped on the basis of maternal work status (Hoffman, 1989). However, recently there have been several studies on the effects of maternal employment on attachment behavior in children that have found negative consequences (Belsky, 1988). These studies have linked a mother's employment during her child's first two years to insecure attachment patterns in her children.

Bowlby (1988) defined attachment behavior as any form of behavior that results in a person's attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious when the

person is distressed, ill, or afraid. Attachment style is generally quite stable, although under certain conditions, attachment patterns are likely to change (Scharfe, 1991).

The effect of maternal employment on attachment is theoretically interesting because attachment theory has been interpreted as suggesting that the repeated separations of mothers and infants for day-care are disruptive to the caregiving interactions needed for the formation of secure attachment (West & Sheldon, 1994). In his 1988 review on day-care and attachment, Belsky summarized four studies of the relation between infant day-care experience and attachment classification in children from low risk samples. Belsky combined the data from these studies and showed that, across the four samples, infant day-care experience was significantly related to insecure attachments and higher avoidance of the mother. He concluded from these results that "some non-maternal care arrangement in the first year for more than 20 hours per week may be a risk factor in the emergence of developmental difficulties (Belsky, 1988).

Belsky's conclusion elicited criticism from several researchers and replication efforts met with mixed success. Scarr (1994) and Scarr, McCartney & Philips (1989) reviewed fourteen studies using the "stranger situation" attachment paradigm, and found no difference in attachment behavior between children attending day-care and children reared at home. Roggmen, Langlois, Hubbs-Tait & Rieser-Danner (1988) used the same attachment techniques and statistical techniques as did Belsky, but did not find a consistent relation between day care and attachment style classification. They reasoned that obtaining significant differences between day care and home care groups may depend on how full- and part-time care are defined, which attachment measures are

used, and how the data are analyzed. They suggested that part-time day care may be related to greater anxiety in the mother-child relationship than either no day care or full-time day care. This maybe due to the part-time employed mothers and their children having to cope with less regular schedules.

Alternatively, part-time employment offers advantages to both mothers and their children. It may be that part-time maternal employment operates differently depending on the age of the child. Richards and Duckett (1994) examined how maternal work may shape pre- and young adolescents' daily life experience using a self-report technique. Relative to those with nonemployed mothers, youth with part-time employed mothers reported more positive daily moods and higher self-esteem. Another study examined longitudinally the effects of maternal employment in prior years on adolescents' grades and educational expectations. The eleven-year follow up study found that part-time maternal employment was optimal for children's academic expectations and performance (Williams & Radin, 1993).

Many studies have been conducted to determine how children's life experiences are affected by maternal work status. Research has examined the effects of such variables as full-time versus part-time employment, age of children during mother's employment, social class, gender of child, and parental attitudes concerning employment and family. However, little attention has been paid to how a child's personality type may mediate the effects of maternal employment.

The Role of Extraversion

A child's level of extraversion may substantially affect whether maternal

employment has positive or negative effects on a child. Children's responses to their social environment vary as a function of their extraversion. Those low on this dimension, introverts, are typically shy and anxious in all novel social situations. They generally prefer to withdraw from people rather than approach them (Liebert & Spiegler, 1974). In contrast, extraverts have an unusual ease among people, great friendliness, and a marked ability and willingness to introduce themselves and seek out people (Liebert & Spiegler, 1974). This personality trait tends to remain stable throughout an individual's life. Studies show that friendly infants tend to become friendly teenagers, while cold infants are also somewhat unfriendly as adolescents (Schafer & Bayley, 1963).

One of the few studies exploring this interaction between personality and maternal employment (Domingo, Keppley & Chambliss, 1997) found that extraversion mediated attachment effects of maternal employment during infancy. They found that subjects high in extraversion seemed to show more adverse adult attachment consequences following fulltime maternal employment during infancy. Extraverted infants may be more comfortable with continued maternal presence, while introverted infants may adapt better to the periods of separation associated with infant day care.

Extraversion may also influence the impact of maternal employment on schoolage children. Maternal absence after school might affect extraverted and introverted children differently. While an introverted child might thrive on being left alone, this unsupervised private time may be less optimal for an extraverted child who prefers more contact with others. If a mother leaves an introverted child alone while she attends work, the child may well enjoy the private time. However, an extraverted child who is left

alone may be distressed. In considering whether maternal employment is beneficial or detrimental, it is important to consider how different situations influence different personality types in varying ways.

In making career decisions, many mothers continue to worry about the long term consequences of their choices to return to the workplace when their children are still young. To date, there have been few empirical studies of adult children's perceptions of the impact of their mother's employment status. Although much is known about the short term consequences of maternal employment (based on studies of young children), there are relatively few investigations using adolescent samples and even fewer using adult subjects. In predicting the long term effects of maternal employment, generalizing conclusions based on childhood studies may be unwarranted. The present study used a young adult sample to assess the residual impact of maternal employment on attachment style more directly than previous childhood studies.

The present study also examined whether maternal employment affects children differently depending on their personality. Extraversion was expected to mediate the effects of maternal employment on adult attachment. Since solitude is more consistent with the preferences of introverted children, maternal employment during the school age period was expected to be less of a problem for introverted than extraverted youngsters.

Methods

Subjects: One hundred and six introductory psychology students at Ursinus College served as participants. They received two extra credit points for their participation.

Procedure: The packet used in this study was handed out to subjects in an introductory psychology class. The subjects were asked if they would fill out the packet in its entirety. Ample time was allotted to the subjects to complete the questionnaire.

The packet used in this study consisted of five separate questionnaires along with a page designed to obtain background information about each subject. The subjects were first asked their sex and age. Subjects then gave information about their mother's work status at each period of development. The stages of development and ages of each stage of development are as follows: infancy (birth to 1/2 years), preschool (age 2-5), childhood (age 6-12), and adolescence (age 13-15). The subjects were to report whether their mothers worked part-time, full-time, or not at all at each stage of development.

Subjects also disclosed information about their mother's job, indicating whether it was professional, whit collar, or blue collar work. One question on background information requires the subjects to answer whether or not they had been raised in a single parent household at any throughout their lives. Other questions asked as part of background information included questions about how much time their mothers devoted to volunteer activities and whether their mothers helped them a lot with homework and school projects.

Subjects also answered questions about the ages at which they were first left alone or placed in charge of younger siblings. Still other questions concerning background disclosed whether the subject enjoyed being left alone or if they felt lonely and abandoned. The last background question addressed whether the subject was encouraged to be independent as a child and whether they were delegated many responsibilities as a

child.

The first questionnaire in the packet was the Self Assessment of Adulthood Scale (SAAS), which consists of 18 items. This questionnaire was created by the authors to measure the subjects' perceived maturity. The subjects were again asked to circle a number from 1 to 4 depending on how strongly each subject agreed or disagreed with each statement.

The second scale in the packet was the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) developed by Collins and Read (1996). This scale measures self assessment of relationship-building skills and self-described style in forming close attachments. The AAS consists of 18 items scored along a 5-point scale ranging from not at all characteristic of me (1) to very characteristic of me (5). Factor analysis identified three subscales of six items each. The Depend Subscale measures the extent participants trust others and rely on them to be available if needed. The Close subscale assesses comfort with intimacy and emotional closeness. The third subscale, Anxiety, measures fears of being abandoned in relationships. The test-retest correlations for the Close, Depend, and Anxiety subscales were .68, .71, and .52 respectively.

The third component of the packet was a measure of extraversion. This scale is a subscale taken from the Eysenck Personality Inventory (1963). The Eysenck Personality Inventory was developed as a measure of the way people behave, feel and act. The extraversion subscale consists of twenty-two items. The subjects responded to the questions with either a yes or a no, depending on whether the item was characteristic of them or not.

The last questionnaire in the packet was the Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire (ARQ) and the Adolescent Relationship Scales Questionnaire (ARSQ) (Scharfe,E., 1995). The Original Relationship Questionnaire developed for adults was revised by Scharfe to create these adolescent measures, more appropriate for single college students. The Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire measures how Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied, and Dismissing subjects are in their relationships. The scale is also used to categorize individuals into four attachment categories paralleling these constructs. The subjects were asked to rate the extent to which the categories were characteristic of them on a five point Likert Scale ranging from (1) not at all like me to (5) very much like me. The Adolescent Relationship Scales Questionnaire reflects the same four dimensions. The ARSQ contains 17 items in which a five point Likert Scale is used to show the degree to which a statement describes the subject's feelings. The scale ranges from (1) not characteristic of me to (5) very characteristic of me. The reliability and validity for the ARSQ and ARQ yielded scale alphas of .30 and .60.

Results

Mean directionally adjusted response were calculated, yielding scores for each subject on seven attachment subscales: Depend, Close, Anxiety (Collins and Read, 1996); Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissing, and Fearful (Scharfe, 1995). A median split was performed to divide subjects into high (Extrovert) and low (Introvert) extraversion subgroups. Subjects were then grouped on the basis of their mother's employment status during the subject's preschool, elementary, and adolescent years (fulltime, parttime, nonemployed).

Two-way ANOVA (Extraversion x Maternal Employment Group) were performed on the attachment subscale scores. Significant main effects for Extraversion were found on the Depend and Dismissing scales (see Table 1).

For the preschool age period, no significant main effects for Maternal Employment were found on the seven attachment subscales (see Table 2). There were also no significant interaction effects found (see Table 3).

For the elementary school age period, significant main effects for Maternal Employment were found on the Depend, Secure, and Preoccupied scales (see Table 4). No significant interaction effects were found (see Table 5).

For the adolescent period, significant main effects for Maternal Employment were found on the Depend scale (see Table 6). A significant interaction effect was found on the Dismissing scale (see Table 7).

Generally, parttime maternal employment was associated with more favorable attachment scores than fulltime maternal employment. However, for Introverts, maternal nonemployment was associated with poorer adult attachment scores than parttime employment. In contrast, for Extraverts, fulltime maternal employment was related to poorer attachment.

ANOVA revealed no significant differences in perceived autonomy or extraversion across the maternal employment groups.

Discussion

Examination of attachment scores following Maternal Employment during the preschool years (ages 2-5) failed to find significant effects. The present study also failed

to find significant effects on the attachment scales. This is consistent with previous research saying that maternal employment during the preschool years does not greatly effect these children.

When elementary school and adolescent years were examined, part-time maternal employment was consistently shown to have superior attachment outcomes over full-time maternal employment and nonemployment. This suggests that once children reach school age, part-time work may offer mothers certain advantages. The ability of mothers to nurture effectively may be facilitated by modest workplace involvement; too much or too little may often compromise a mother's effectiveness in maintaining an optimal social environment for her children. Alternatively, selection factors may underlie the effects observed. Mothers who opt for part-time work may make their children more of a priority, which may affect children's developing attachment style.

The interaction effects observed for adolescents suggest that nonemployment of mothers may have negative attachment consequences for some introverted children. These children may tend to become even more withdrawn if they are not provided with the time to themselves permitted by maternal employment. Perhaps extraverts may benefit more from nonemployment of mothers, because they prefer more constant interaction with others.

Table 1

Attachment subscale scores for Introverts and Extraverts

	Introverts			Extraverts			
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)							
Depend	35	3.0	.7	39	3.3	.6	4.78*
Close	35	3.4	.9	39	3.6	.7	1.59-ns
Anxiety	35	3.0	1.1	39	2.9	1.0	.31-ns
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)							
Secure	41	3.3	.7	40	3.3	.6	.01-ns
Preoccupied	41	2.7	.8	40	2.8	.7	.74-ns
Dismissing	41	3.2	.6	40	2.9	.5	5.29*
Fearful	41	2.7	.8	40	2.4	.8	2.96-ns

* $p < .05$

Note. Low scores reflect more favorable attachment on all scales except Depend, Close, and Secure.

Table 2

Attachment subscale scores for Preschool-age Maternal Employment Groups

	Maternal Employment: Full-time			Part-time			NonEmployed			
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)										
Depend	20	3.1	.7	20	3.3	.8	34	3.2	.6	.47-ns
Close	20	3.5	.7	20	3.6	1.1	34	3.5	.7	.31-ns
Anxiety	20	3.1	1.2	20	2.6	1.2	34	3.0	.9	1.6-ns
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)										
Secure	21	3.2	.4	22	3.3	.8	38	3.3	.7	.36-ns
Preoccupied	21	2.8	.9	22	2.5	.9	38	2.9	.7	1.42-ns
Dismissing	21	3.0	.4	22	3.1	.5	38	3.1	.5	.91-ns
Fearful	21	2.7	.8	22	2.5	.9	38	2.5	.7	.59-ns

*$p < .05$

Note. Low scores reflect more favorable attachment on all scales except Depend, Close, and Secure .

Table 3

Extraversion and Maternal Employment Group During Preschool

Attachment Subscales / Maternal Employment Status	Introvert Group n	M	SD	Extravert Group n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)							
Depend							.30-ns
Fulltime	11	3.0	.7	9	3.2	.6	
Parttime	10	3.1	.6	10	3.5	.7	
Nonemployed	14	2.9	.8	20	3.3	.6	
Close							.22-ns
Fulltime	11	3.5	.6	9	3.5	.8	
Parttime	10	3.5	1.1	10	3.8	.7	
Nonemployed	14	3.3	1.0	20	3.6	.5	
Anxiety							2.34-ns
Fulltime	11	2.8	1.1	9	3.4	.99	
Parttime	10	2.7	1.3	10	2.5	1.0	
Nonemployed	14	3.3	1.0	20	2.8	.8	
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)							
Secure (Scharfe)							.09-ns
Fulltime	12	3.2	.5	9	3.2	.7	
Parttime	12	3.3	.8	10	3.4	.7	
Nonemployed	17	3.3	.7	21	3.3	.6	
Preoccupied (Scharfe)							1.29-ns
Fulltime	12	2.6	.7	9	3.2	.9	
Parttime	12	2.5	.9	10	2.5	.7	
Nonemployed	17	2.9	.7	21	2.9	.6	
Dismissing (Scharfe)							1.68-ns
Fulltime	12	3.1	.4	9	2.9	.2	
Parttime	12	3.4	.6	10	2.8	.4	
Nonemployed	17	3.2	.6	21	3.1	.5	
Fearful							.33-ns
Fulltime	12	2.8	.7	9	2.7	.9	
Parttime	12	2.6	1.0	10	2.4	.8	
Nonemployed	17	2.8	.8	21	2.3	.6	

*p < .05
**p < .01

Table 4

Attachment subscale scores for Elementary School-age Maternal Employment Groups

Maternal Employment	Full-time			Part-time			NonEmployed			
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)										
Depend	31	3.0	.7	20	3.5	.8	24	3.1	.6	3.60*
Close	31	3.4	.7	20	3.7	1.1	24	3.5	.7	.67-ns
Anxiety	31	3.0	1.2	20	2.5	1.2	24	3.1	.9	2.22-ns
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)										
Secure	34	3.1	.4	24	3.5	.8	24	3.4	.7	3.37*
Preoccupied	34	3.0	.9	24	2.4	.9	24	2.8	.7	3.71*
Dismissing	34	3.2	.4	24	3.0	.5	24	3.1	.5	1.52-ns
Fearful	34	2.8	.8	24	2.3	.9	24	2.5	.7	2.40-ns

*$p < .05$

Note. Low scores reflect more favorable attachment on all scales except Depend, Close, and Secure .

Table 5

Extraversion and Maternal Employment Group During Elementary School Age Period

Attachment Subscales / Maternal Employment Status	Introvert Group n	M	SD	Extravert Group n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)							
Depend							1.01 ns
Fulltime	19	3.0	.7	12	3.0	.5	
Parttime	9	3.2	.7	11	3.7	.6	
Nonemployed	7	2.8	.8	17	3.3	.6	
Close							1.33 ns
Fulltime	19	3.5	.6	12	3.3	.9	
Parttime	9	3.4	1.1	11	3.9	.6	
Nonemployed	7	3.2	1.3	17	3.6	.5	
Anxiety							1.23 ns
Fulltime	19	2.9	1.1	12	3.2	.8	
Parttime	9	2.7	1.2	11	2.4	1.0	
Nonemployed	7	3.5	.9	17	3.0	.9	
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)							
Secure (Scharfe)							.79 ns
Fulltime	20	3.1	.7	14	3.0	.7	
Parttime	13	3.4	.7	11	3.6	.6	
Nonemployed	8	3.5	.5	16	3.3	.6	
Preoccupied (Scharfe)							.41 ns
Fulltime	20	2.8	.8	14	3.1	.6	
Parttime	13	3.5	.8	11	2.4	.7	
Nonemployed	8	2.7	.4	16	2.9	.7	
Dismissing (Scharfe)							.52 ns
Fulltime	20	3.2	.5	14	3.1	.4	
Parttime	13	3.1	.5	11	2.8	.5	
Nonemployed	8	3.3	.7	16	3.1	.5	
Fearful							2.02 ns
Fulltime	20	2.7	.8	14	2.9	.8	
Parttime	13	2.6	.8	11	2.1	.8	
Nonemployed	8	2.9	.8	16	2.3	.6	

*p < .05
**p < .01

Table 6

Attachment subscale scores for Adolescent-age Maternal Employment Groups

Maternal Employment	Full-time			Part-time			NonEmployed			
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)										
Depend	43	3.2	.7	20	3.4	.8	12	2.8	.6	4.12*
Close	43	3.5	.7	20	3.7	1.1	12	3.4	.7	1.24-ns
Anxiety	43	2.9	1.2	20	2.7	1.2	12	3.5	.9	2.50-ns
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)										
Secure	48	3.2	.4	23	3.5	.8	11	3.2	.7	1.48-ns
Preoccupied	48	2.8	.9	23	2.6	.9	11	2.9	.7	1.37-ns
Dismissing	48	3.2	.4	23	2.9	.5	11	3.2	.5	1.87-ns
Fearful	48	2.6	.8	23	2.3	.9	11	2.8	.7	2.06-ns

*$p < .05$

Note. Low scores reflect more favorable attachment on all scales except Depend, Close, and Secure .

Table 7

Extraversion and Maternal Employment Group During Adolescence

Attachment Subscales / Maternal Employment Status	Introvert Group n	M	SD	Extravert Group n	M	SD	F
Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996)							
Depend							.42 ns
Fulltime	22	3.0	.7	21	3.3	.6	
Parttime	9	3.2	.7	11	3.6	.5	
Nonemployed	4	2.4	.6	8	3.0	.7	
Close							2.04 ns
Fulltime	22	3.5	.6	21	3.4	.7	
Parttime	9	3.5	1.1	11	3.9	.6	
Nonemployed	4	2.8	1.6	8	3.6	.6	
Anxiety							.04 ns
Fulltime	22	2.9	1.1	21	2.8	.9	
Parttime	9	2.8	1.0	11	2.6	1.1	
Nonemployed	4	3.7	1.0	8	3.4	.7	
Adolescent Relationship Scales (Scharfe, 1995)							
Secure (Scharfe)							.07 ns
Fulltime	26	3.2	.7	22	3.2	.7	
Parttime	11	3.5	.7	12	3.4	.7	
Nonemployed	4	3.3	.3	7	3.2	.4	
Preoccupied (Scharfe)							.10 ns
Fulltime	26	2.8	.9	22	2.9	.7	
Parttime	11	2.4	.6	12	2.7	.5	
Nonemployed	4	2.9	.4	7	2.9	.8	
Dismissing (Scharfe)							3.33*
Fulltime	26	3.2	.5	22	3.1	.5	
Parttime	11	2.9	.4	12	3.0	.4	
Nonemployed	4	3.8	.6	7	2.9	.6	
Fearful							.786 ns
Fulltime	26	2.7	.7	22	2.6	.7	
Parttime	11	2.5	.8	12	2.2	.7	
Nonemployed	4	3.3	1.0	7	2.5	.8	

*p < .05
**p < .01

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